

Handwriting

Good handwriting (i.e., legible writing done by hand whether it is printed or cursive) is an important life skill that all students should develop. It allows writers to be fluent and to communicate with others. Although no two people have exactly the same handwriting, there is usually uniformity in the way letters are formed.

Your goal is to teach students correct letter formation and encourage neatness and a sense of pride in their writing. Grade three is a transitional year. Students may print for the first part of the year and gradually move into cursive writing. Although handwriting is often taught as a separate subject, it is a skill that can be taught anytime a student puts pencil to paper, whether in a written literature response, observations for a Science experiment, or a Math journal entry. Below are some ideas you may find helpful.

Teaching Printing

You should model the flow of printing words and sentences during Modelled and Shared Writing sessions. Make sure all students can see clearly as you write. For those students who are having difficulty, gather a small group and describe out loud what you are doing as you write so that students can learn how you form specific letters. For example, if you were forming the letter “b,” you might say,

“I’m going to make sure that I start at the top and then come down like this.”



“Now I’m going to come halfway back up like this.”



“Now I’m going to add half a circle like this.”



It is beneficial to practise letters with a similar formation in a group. Once students learn to form one letter in the group, the other letters with similar formations will be easier to learn. Letters that do not follow a formation pattern may need to be taught on their own. See Printing Letter Formation on pages 266–267 for instructions on how to form each letter.

Note

Upper-case letters formed similarly to their lower-case counterparts: C, K, O, P, S, T, U, V, W, X, Z

Upper-case letters formed differently than their lower-case counterparts: A, B, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, L, M, N, Q, R, Y

Note

Cursive writing often appears sloppy because the letters do not slant uniformly.

The following are suggested clusters for teaching similar letters. Remember, this should be small group or individualized instruction on the letters or clusters of letters with which those students are having difficulty.

Lower-case Letters

- ▶ Starting counterclockwise: a, c, d, e, f, g, o, s, q
- ▶ Starting down: i, j, k, l, t, u
- ▶ Starting down and then going up: b, h, m, n, p, r
- ▶ Using diagonal lines: v, w, x, y, z

Upper-case Letters

- ▶ Straight lines: E, F, H, I, L, T
- ▶ Diagonal straight lines: A, K, M, N, V, W, X, Y, Z
- ▶ Lines and curves: B, D, J, P, R, U
- ▶ Starting counterclockwise: C, G, O, Q, S

Teaching Cursive Writing

Students should be comfortable and fluent with printing before they move into cursive writing. Show students some words in both printing and cursive writing. Verbalize your hand movements as you demonstrate for students. Focus on the proper alignment, shape, and slant of cursive writing. Discuss how the letters are connected and point out the consistent slant to the letters.

Explain to students that in cursive writing, there is generally a beginning tail, the printed letter form, and an ending tail. Note that only six letters are formed differently in cursive writing compared to printing: b, e, f, r, s, z.

Again, it is beneficial to practise letters with a similar formation in a group. (See Cursive Writing Letter Formation on pages 268–269 for instructions on how to form each letter.)

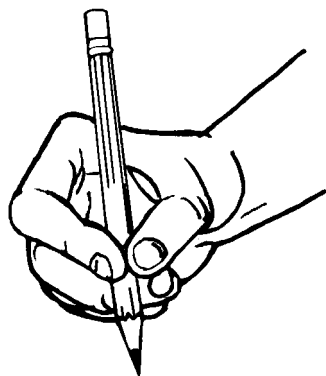
The following are suggested clusters for teaching letters with similar strokes. Remember, this should be small group or individualized instruction on the letters or clusters of letter with which those students are having difficulty.

- ▶ Letters with an under curve: b, e, f, h, i, k, l, r, s, t, u, w
- ▶ Letter with an over curve or hump letters: m, n, v, x, y, z
- ▶ Letters with a downward curve: a, c, d, g, o
- ▶ Letters with a lower loop: j, y, g

Supporting Handwriting

To help students learn to print or write, you might also try the following:

- ▶ Observe how students form letters as you move around the classroom, and provide individual assistance as needed. Focus on only one letter or group of letters when providing assistance so that students don't become overwhelmed and shut down as writers.
- ▶ If you notice some students having difficulties with the same letters, call them together for small-group instruction.
- ▶ Always praise students' attempts to form letters and provide assistance in a supportive manner. Many students are sensitive about their handwriting and need gentle scaffolding in order to achieve success.
- ▶ Discuss with students why it is important to have legible handwriting (i.e., so they and other people can read their writing easily).
- ▶ Separate your instruction of handwriting from your instruction of the writing process.
- ▶ Show students how to hold their writing tools properly (i.e., between the thumb and first finger and resting on their middle finger).
- ▶ Encourage students to hold writing tools with a relaxed grip (too tight a grip can cause cramping) and to write with medium downward pressure (excessive pressure can rip the paper).
- ▶ Have students practise forming letters on wide-lined paper. As they develop their fine-motor control, encourage them to write on the lines.
- ▶ Have students practise making the letters in the air with big arm movements. They can also practise forming letters with their fingers on sandpaper or another tactile surface. Forming the letters with their eyes closed can help them get the feel of each letter.
- ▶ Impress upon students the need to take the time to do their best handwriting when publishing their work.



Left-Handed Students

Left-handed students often have difficulty forming some letters. The up and down strokes are equally natural to both left-handed and right-handed writers. However, the natural tendency of left-handed writers is to make cross strokes right to left rather than left to right as right-handed writers do. Be on the lookout for any difficulties your left-handed students may be having. Allow them to make the cross strokes in another direction.

It is also a good idea to ensure the paper of left-handed students is oriented on a slight angle to the left. Tell students to keep their left wrist straight rather than hooked—a habit many left-handed writers develop so they can see what they have written. Students can shift the paper to the left as the writing progresses across the page.

Teaching Tip

Having students copy letters from the chalkboard or distant charts does little to assist them with letter formation. Students need to practise letter formation with the letters directly in front of them so that their eyes are following a straight line for transfer.

The Classroom

You can facilitate students' learning to print or write legibly by following these suggestions:

- ▶ Provide a model of legible printing and cursive writing at all times, for example, on class charts and during Modelled and Shared writing opportunities.
- ▶ Display the alphabet in your classroom so that all students can see it clearly. Also make copies of the alphabet to attach onto the tables or desks of those students who are having difficulty. (You can use Letter Formation on pages 266–269.)
- ▶ Use attractive lettering for songs, poems, class lists, and signs displayed around your classroom. Remember, you are providing a model for your students.
- ▶ Ensure students have adequate space around them at their tables so that they are able to move their arms freely as they write.
- ▶ Provide a wide variety of materials for students to use when they are publishing (e.g., different sizes of paper, cardboard, letter stencils, markers, coloured pencils, crayons). This encourages students' creativity and a resulting sense of pride in their work.
- ▶ Ensure pencils and other writing materials are sharpened before use.

Monitoring Progress

Handwriting is best assessed and monitored through informal observations of students as they write. Based on these observations, you can provide demonstrations in whole-class, small-group, and individual settings as needed. It is pointless to demonstrate to all students how to form specific letters if only a few students are having difficulties. In this case, small-group instruction would be most appropriate.

The Letter Formation Checklist (page 270) may help you assess students' skills in forming specific letters whether they are printing or cursive writing. This will, in turn, help when planning whole-class, small-group, and individual lessons based on identified needs. The Handwriting Behaviours Checklist (page 271) can help you assess students' progress in printing or cursive writing.

Having students talk about and self-assess their printing or cursive writing will help them to develop a sense of pride in their handwriting. Ask them to consider the following:

- ▶ Do all my letters slant the same way?
- ▶ Do my letters sit on the line?
- ▶ Are my letters the right size?
- ▶ Did I leave enough space between my letters (or words)?
- ▶ Can I read my writing?
- ▶ Can others read my writing?

Printing: Lower-case Letter Formation

Student's Name: _____

a b c d e

f g h i j

k l m n o

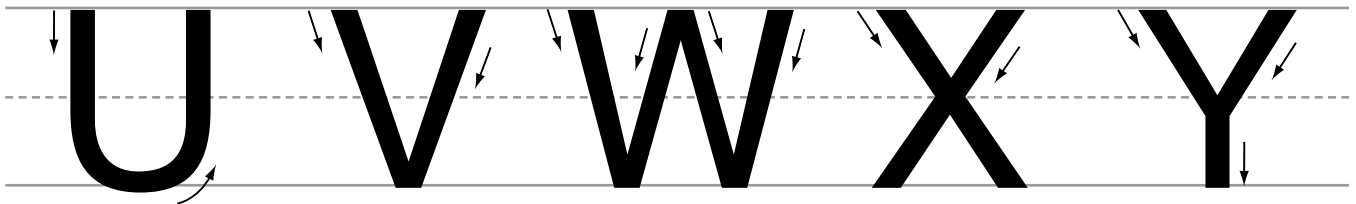
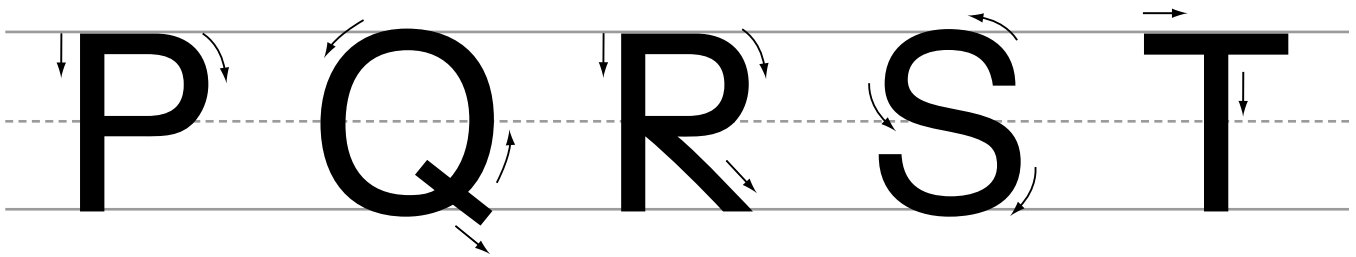
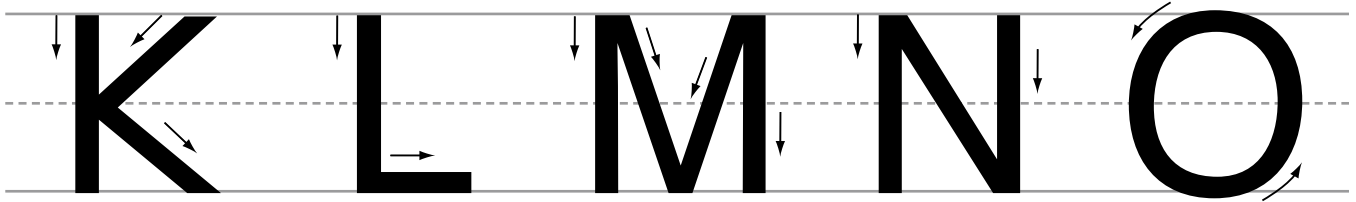
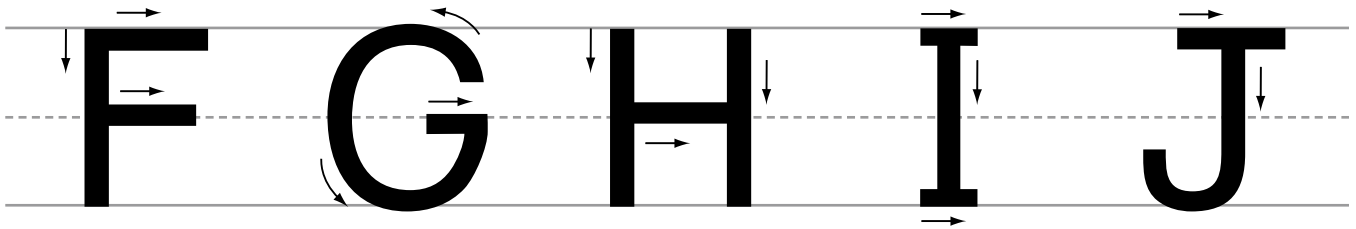
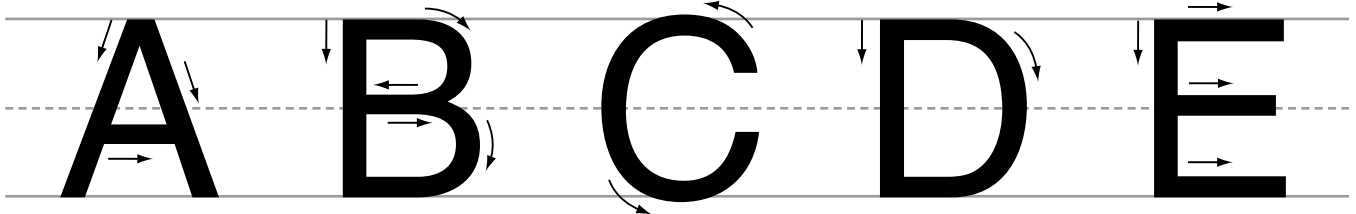
p q r s t

u v w x y

z

Printing: Capital Letter Formation

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____



Writing: Lower-case Letter Formation

Student's Name: _____

a b c d e

f g h i j

k l m n o

p q r s t

u v w x y

z

Writing: Lower-case Letter Formation

Student's Name: _____

a b c d e

f g h i j

k l m n o

p q r s t

u v w x y

z

Letter Formation Checklist

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Printing Cursive Writing

Place a checkmark next to those letters that the student can form correctly.

Lower-case Letters	Correct Formation	Upper-case Letters	Correct Formation
a		A	
b		B	
c		C	
d		D	
e		E	
f		F	
g		G	
h		H	
i		I	
j		J	
k		K	
l		L	
m		M	
n		N	
o		O	
p		P	
q		Q	
r		R	
s		S	
t		T	
u		U	
v		V	
w		W	
x		X	
y		Y	
z		Z	

Instructional Needs

Handwriting Behaviours Checklist

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Printing Cursive Writing

Handwriting Behaviours	Observations
Positions paper appropriately	
Holds writing tool appropriately	
Writes on the lines	
Starts at left margin	
Leaves appropriate space between letters	
Leaves appropriate space between words	
Forms letters fluently	
Writes legibly	
Slants all letters in the same direction	
Takes pride in handwriting	
Uses upper-case and lower-case letters where appropriate	